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THE PURPOSE OF SOCIOLOGY.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY. IX.

THE three concluding papers of this series will treat respectively of the three phases of social dynamics enumerated in the tabular scheme placed at the end of the paper on "The Mechanics of Society," in the last number of this JOURNAL, page 254, viz.; 1, "Social Genesis;" 2, "Individual Telesis;" and 3, "Collective Telesis." Before passing, however, to the more detailed examination of these topics it was thought best to introduce the very important subject of the purpose, need, occasion, or *raison d'être* of sociology. The object of this is not to formulate an answer to those who deny the existence of a social science. To such no answer would probably be satisfactory. But it is becoming more and more apparent that among those who acknowledge the possibility of the science, and who are actually contributing to its development, there are two fairly distinct schools, not only in the world at large but even in America, and, indeed, they have already become as clearly differentiated in this country as they are abroad. While none of the adherents of either of these schools have definitely formulated any of the doctrines that distinguish them, their writings differ in certain fundamental respects that are sufficient to warrant their rough classification as above stated. The fundamental difference has primarily to do with just this question as to the utility, and especially the object or purpose of sociology.

It is difficult to select terms that will clearly indicate this difference. They might be characterized respectively as the Static and the Dynamic schools. The objection to these terms is that both recognize dynamic phenomena, although one of them devotes little attention to it. More correctly speaking, it

recognizes social movements, but pays little attention to the forces that cause these movements. One writer has expressly objected to the term dynamic, and proposed to substitute *kinetic*, as not connoting force. There is no objection to the use of the name Dynamic for the other school, as its distinguishing characteristic is the emphasis it places on the conception of forces in society, and it also recognizes conscious as well as unconscious social forces. The statico-kinetic school might also with considerable propriety be called the Spencerian school, since Mr. Spencer's sociology is marked by substantially the same characteristics, and the American writers are virtually disciples of Spencer. No one of the dynamic writers, however, would be willing to be called Comtean, because, although Comte treated of both social statics and social dynamics, and clearly differentiated them, still he can scarcely be said to have recognized social forces, and certainly never defined their nature.

The statico-kinetic or Spencerian school does not think the time has come to attempt to indicate what the effect of social science is likely to be. It treats it simply as a branch of any one's education, as explaining the facts, phenomena and laws of a certain field of knowledge, and trusts to the natural influence that all knowledge necessarily has in sobering opinion and modifying action. In a word, it regards sociology as a pure science and deprecates all attempts to apply its principles. At least it impliedly denies the ability of sociologists, either as teachers or writers, to point out its applications either to students or readers, and would leave this wholly to practical men, whether in the business world or in politics.

The dynamic school, on the contrary, clearly perceiving the chaotic condition of both the industrial and the political world, and recognizing that most of the evils of society result from a lack of scientific knowledge on the part of the so-called practical men, claims the right and feels the obligation to accompany the statement of facts and the definition of laws and principles with an indication of their significance and their necessary bearing upon social affairs and movements. It is only

occasionally possible to apply sociological principles to the current problems of the day. These are usually only special cases of some large class that comes under some broad principle, and about all that can be done is to make the application of the principle to the class. If this is understood the special cases will take care of themselves. There is therefore very little danger that the teacher of sociology will take sides on current questions and defend this or that public policy. He cares little for such questions because he sees that if the underlying principles are understood they will settle themselves. But if it chance that public questions arise that are broad enough to come directly under any sociological law there is no reason why he should hesitate in such cases any more than in any other to make the application. Still, if he finds that deep students of sociology differ as to the application, this should be a warning to him to refrain from hastily deciding what the principle really teaches in the particular case. The sociologist always sees the application of laws to current questions. They are all grouped in his mind under the laws, and may be used as illustrations, but they are usually so superficial that he can make little use of them. He prefers to take his illustrations from past history and from the various special social and even physical sciences that furnish the data of sociology.

The distinction of the two schools as pure and applied sociology, therefore, would be convenient if it were not that the dynamic school accepts the pure stage as fully as the static school. The real difference is that the former carries the science farther than the latter. From a merely passive science it pushes it forward into an active science. It renders it constructive.

In addition to the above reasons for introducing into this series a paper on the purpose of sociology, there is a personal one which it seems necessary to state in order to make my own position clear. In *Dynamic Sociology* I of course placed myself squarely upon the constructive ground. The advanced position there taken was open to criticism, as I expected it to

be, but in addition to adverse criticism, which I desired and courted, I observed some tendency to make too much of the doctrines I advanced. This was especially the case with the principle of conscious social action. I had repeatedly stated that society thus far must be regarded as in the main unconscious, and therefore the whole idea of social action for the sake of improvement was an ideal which simply followed from the assumption of such a train of conditions as are described in Vol. II of that work. I did not wish to lay too great stress upon it as a present or early future possibility. When, therefore, in an article on "Static and Dynamic Sociology," which appeared in the *Political Science Quarterly* for June, 1895, I sought to draw a clear line between these two kinds of sociology, I purposely omitted all reference to what I now call collective teleosis, because the distinction could be made equally clear without it, and its introduction would have weakened my argument in the minds of just those persons to whom I desired to appeal.

To this omission and my general disinclination to push this part of my social philosophy, as manifested in other popular articles, I have attributed the impression that I have observed among contemporary sociological writers that I had to some extent abandoned that doctrine. The clearest expression of this that I can readily refer to is contained in Professor Vincent's exhaustive paper on the "Province of Sociology" that appeared in the *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY* for January, 1896, p. 487. Under "(c) The 'constructive' theory, or the projection of social tendencies into ideals for guidance," he says: "Small stands for this as one of the functions of sociology, and Ward in his early work distinctly advanced this view. Judged by his recent articles the latter has apparently modified his position." In 1893, or ten years after the appearance of *Dynamic Sociology*, this doctrine was as distinctly reaffirmed as in the "early work." Professor Vincent does not refer to my *Psychic Factors of Civilization* in which (Part III) this was done, and the inference seems plain that he was unacquainted with it.

It may be said that after the paper on the "Mechanics of

Society" in the last number of this JOURNAL this explanation was unnecessary. It certainly will be rendered so by the concluding paper of this series (No. 12, on "Collective Telesis"), but it can have done no harm to disabuse in advance the minds of any who may think that I have abandoned the position originally taken, however little sanguine I may have been and still am of rapid progress toward such an ideal.

It may seem absurd to ask what is the purpose of any science. No one would claim that the purpose of astronomy is to assist navigation, or that the purpose of biology is to facilitate the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals. Science is supposed to be pursued for its own sake, to increase the sum of knowledge. There is a vague idea that it is somehow a good thing to have knowledge increased, while poets and philosophers have perceived that "knowledge is power," but no one has pointed out specifically in what way knowledge operates as a power. A general comparison of peoples without science with peoples that possess science shows that science must have something to do with what we call civilization, and yet it is insisted that science is not to be pursued for any practical purpose. Indeed, the practical view of science is generally condemned, and numerous illustrations are adduced of the most important practical results flowing from studies that seemed to be perfectly useless. These cases are calculated to inspire faith in the general utility of all knowledge and have thus accomplished great good. It is of course clear to all that mathematics, physics, and chemistry have an immediate practical value in the affairs of life, but most of the other sciences—geology, botany, zoölogy, ethnology, psychology, etc.—are looked upon mainly in the light of culture, like history, literature, fine art, etc. Anatomy and physiology constitute exceptions, as having a direct bearing upon health.

In general it may be said that as long as, and in proportion as nature is regarded as anthropocentric the knowledge of nature will not be looked upon as of any special practical use to man. The truth that is gradually taking the place of this two-

fold error is that instead of nature being anthropocentric and science indifferent, nature is indifferent and science is anthropocentric. It *is* true that every step in the advance of knowledge has resulted in practical benefit to man morally or materially, and both the philosophic ken and the popular instinct as to the usefulness of knowledge are correct. The knowledge generally understood as scientific is the most useful and practical of all kinds of knowledge. Scientific knowledge is the knowledge of nature, *i. e.*, of natural things and natural laws. In short it is a knowledge of the environment, and the reason why it is so useful is because it is his relations to his environment that man chiefly needs to know.

The environment is not wholly objective, although there is nothing that may not be contemplated objectively. The subjective environment is in some respects more important to know than the objective. Notwithstanding the old Greek maxim, "Know thyself," it is only in recent times that any adequate idea has been gained of the meaning of that maxim, and although Pope said that "the proper study of mankind is man," still it is only since man began to be studied as a social being and as a being subject to laws as uniform as those that prevail in other departments of nature, that any useful knowledge has been acquired relative to the true nature of man. Man had been supposed to be a "free agent," which meant that there were no laws to which his activities were subject. There could therefore be no science of man, and hence no science of society. Many still so hold, and for such there is no sociology. But those who accept a science of sociology as resting like other sciences on uniform and determinable laws are able to see immense possibilities in this science from a practical point of view. The laws of nature have always proved capable of being turned to man's advantage in proportion as they have been made known, and there is no reason to suppose that those of human nature and of society will form an exception. But it is admitted that they are more complex and difficult to understand, and therefore sociology requires more study than any other science.

There are two ways in which any science may be studied, the speculative and the practical, but the sciences differ among themselves with respect to the extent to which the one or the other of these methods should be carried. As already shown, astronomy and biology, from their inherent nature, do not readily lend themselves to the practical method, but are mainly pursued for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of these great fields of nature. This is so specially true of botany and zoölogy that on a former occasion I used these sciences as representing that method and called it the "natural history method."¹ In the natural history method the only *purpose* is to learn the natural history of the organism in question. This method is the one chiefly employed in nearly all the departments of anthropology, which is treated as a branch of zoölogy for the study of the human organism. Many who claim to be sociologists are accustomed to look upon human society from this point of view, and their sociology is scarcely anything but anthropology.

The science formerly called political economy, but now generally known as economics, has had a somewhat different history. Its cultivators from the first conceived it as a domain of law, but they carried this principle too far and only recognized animal impulses as actuating man in his industrial relations. These are so comparatively simple that the ruder types of men have had no difficulty in perceiving these laws sufficiently well to utilize them in the domestication of animals. This was done empirically, and what science there is on the subject has been of late development. If human activities had been equally simple the political economy based on it would have been almost as exact as solar astronomy. What actually took place, expressed in the language of dynamic sociology, was that while the early political economists recognized the dynamic agent they neglected the directive agent and its influence in causing *perturbations* in human activity. Or, expressed in the language of social mechanics, as set forth in the last paper of this series, they recognized social genesis and founded a science of social

¹ Publications of the *Am. Econ. Assoc.*, Vol. VI, p. 102.

genetics, but they failed to take account of individual telesis as modifying this process. That which has been aptly called "astronomical economics," therefore failed, and it was discovered by the Newton of biology that the Malthusian principle was a fundamental principle of biology.¹ As soon as attention began to be directed to wide classes of facts it was seen that this law required to be modified in so many respects before it could be applied to man as to amount almost to a reversal of it.² While the philosophers were ignoring one half of mind—the feelings—the economists were ignoring the other half—the intellect—and both of these great movements were limping along in this fashion. It has remained for sociology, whether calling itself by that name or not, to recognize the psychologic basis of human activities and to found a science upon all the faculties of the mind.

The fact that the defective political economy described necessarily led to a gloomy view of human life, gaining for it Carlyle's name of the "dismal science," has given birth to the erroneous impression that the early writers were cold, hard-hearted men, who looked upon the laborer as simply a machine to be run until it breaks down, and who had no hope that the conditions they described could ever in the nature of things be altered or improved. The fact is that those writers were all humane and enlightened men with warm sympathies. Adam Smith is now ranked among the founders of utilitarianism, which is an essentially melioristic doctrine. It is a curious fact, rarely referred to, that the very title of the great work of Malthus which is regarded as the most pessimistic of all that class of writings, contains a clear declaration of his humanitarian purpose. Even in the first edition the title reads: *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the future Improvement of Society*. The first seven words remained the same in all editions, but in the second edition the remainder reads: *or a review of*

¹ See Darwin's Autobiography in *Life and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 68.

² See *The Psychologic Basis of Social Economics*, *Proc. A. A. S.*, Vol. XLI, pp. 301-321.

its past and present effects on human happiness. In the seventh edition (I have not been able to consult intermediate ones) these words are added to the last: *with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it occasions.*

This clearly shows that even Malthus wrote for a *purpose*, and that a humanitarian one. The same might be proved for many of the earlier works on political economy. A modern writer, Mr. William Cunningham, makes the following frank confession:

“Economic science is wholly practical, it has no *raison d'être* except as directing conduct towards a given end: it studies the means leading towards that end not merely for the sake of knowledge, but in the hope of guiding men so that they may pursue that end in the most appropriate way: it is not content to describe the principles that have actuated human conduct, but desires to look at these principles in the light of after events, and thus to put forward the means that are best adapted for attaining the end in view.”¹

Is there any good reason why sociology may not have a purpose as well as economics? The character which chiefly distinguishes it from the physical sciences, viz., greater complexity of the phenomena to be studied, scarcely differs in these two sciences. I am myself inclined to regard Mr. Cunningham's language as somewhat too strong. I should say that economics should be studied from both points of view, first for the purpose of learning the laws of industrial activity, and secondly with a view to directing conduct to a given end. In other words, I would concede to that science, as to mathematics, physics, and chemistry, both a pure and an applied stage. But I make the same claim and no more for sociology. That science should also be studied first for the sake of information relating to the laws of human association and coöperative action, and finally

¹ *Politics and Economics: An Essay on the Nature of the Principles of Political Economy, together with a Survey of Recent Legislation*, by WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM, London, 1885, p. 12.

for the purpose of determining in what ways and to what extent social phenomena may, with a knowledge of their laws, be modified and directed towards social ideals. This last is what I understand by Dr. Small's "idealics." The supreme purpose is the betterment of society. The knowledge is the important thing. The action will then take care of itself. But an important part of the knowledge is that action is its object. It was shown in the last paper that the greater part of the action of civilized men is telic, or results from purpose and not from mere impulse. The study of sociology is calculated to enlighten the individual purposes of men and harmonize them with the good of society. It will tend to unify action, to combine the innumerable streams of individual effort and pour their contents into one great river of social welfare. Individual telesis thus verges into collective telesis. In a democracy every citizen is a legislator and government simply becomes the exponent of the social will and purpose. This becomes more and more true as the constituent members of society see things in their true light. Society can only act upon those things with regard to which there is a substantial unity of opinion. There is no more false dogma than that it is necessary for individuals to work at cross purposes. So long as many of the prevailing notions in society are false divisions and dissensions will occur, and these, I grant, are educating in the school of experience. But the greater part of them are unnecessary and disappear as communities become enlightened. The purpose of sociology is to enlighten communities and put an end to useless and expensive dissensions. It is true that as the simpler questions are settled higher and more complicated ones will arise in society, but this very elevation of the plane of public discussion is one of the true marks of social advance. Those who regard partisan struggles as salutary to the intellectual vigor and independence of the people need have no fear. There are questions and questions. What the sociologist demands is simply that every question capable of definitive settlement be put out of the public arena, and that wrangling about anything that *anybody knows* cease. There will

still remain problems that the wisest cannot solve, and upon these men will divide and debate and reflect and experiment until one by one they, too, reach their solution and give way to still subtler, more delicate and more ennobling subjects of discussion and emulation.

But if the purpose of sociology is the betterment of society it becomes necessary to inquire what constitutes social betterment. This may at first sound puerile, because everybody is supposed to know. But let anyone undertake to formulate it and he will not find it so easy. When we specify civilization, enlightenment, morality, progress, etc., as the criteria of social improvement we only multiply the number of terms requiring definition. There is really only one test of the comparative goodness, *i. e.*, the better or worse, in anything, and that is what may be called the ethical test, *viz.*, the degree of satisfaction that it yields. One thing is better than another if it yields a greater amount of satisfaction. It comes down to the agreeable and the disagreeable as the positive and negative states. What is more agreeable is better. What is more disagreeable is worse. The agreeable is the good. The disagreeable is the bad. Looking at the condition of society as a whole we see that this is the test of utility and the basis of economics. The positive social state is the "pleasure economy" of Patten. The "end in view" of Cunningham is the "greatest happiness" of Bentham. Social betterment is the passage out of a pain economy into a pleasure economy, or from an economy that yields only the satisfaction of physical needs to one that fills out the higher spiritual aspirations. Social progress is that which results in social betterment as thus defined, and all the other supposed ends are either simply means to this end or they are names for the various aspects of it.

Now, "social evolution" is the term commonly employed for the general spontaneous movement in the direction above indicated. There may be races that have degenerated. Empires have declined and fallen. But new races and new empires in other parts of the world, usually recruited from the *élite* of the

effete ones, have simultaneously risen far higher than the first. Thus far in human history the series has been upon the whole an ascending one, and man has slowly but rhythmically, and somewhat fitfully advanced. He has done this without the aid of either economics or sociology, in ways which it will be the purpose of the next paper to point out. The question may therefore present itself to some minds: If social evolution goes on without science, what is the need of science except for its own sake? This question is precisely similar to another that is still sometimes asked. Recognizing the great restorative powers of the human system and the fact that under normal conditions nature tends toward health and not toward disease, what is the use of the healing art, and why not leave all to the *vis medicatrix naturæ*? The answer to both questions is generically the same, that so long as the laws of nature, either physiological or social, are not scientifically understood there is no virtue in any form of therapeutics, but so soon as these laws in either department become scientifically known it is possible, and in strict proportion to that knowledge, to "assist nature" in its struggle against all the powers of a hostile environment. The real answer, then, to the question as to the purpose of sociology is: *to accelerate social evolution.*

In thus stating the purpose of sociology, however, I shall not, I trust, be misunderstood by being supposed to confound the purpose of the science itself with the purpose of the student in studying it. By the purpose of the science is meant the general beneficial effect that it is expected to exert upon society at large. It is difficult to estimate the power of a body of knowledge which has once become the common property of a whole people. It is not expected that any great proportion even of the most enlightened public will have actually been at any time students of sociology at any institution of learning. The more there are of such the better, but scientific truth can happily make its way very far into the lives of all classes although received at first hand into the minds of a very few. The power of *established truth* is immense. This is chiefly because no one wants to be found ignorant of, or opposed to, that which has

been proved to be true. A mere theory will make little headway because no one will feel any humiliation in either not knowing it or not accepting it. But when the indications fairly set in that it is something scientifically demonstrated, ignorance becomes a disgrace and non-acceptance a proof of ignorance. A rivalry springs up both to know and to embrace, and thousands who have only the most meager acquaintance with such truths openly defend them.

The history of science is full of illustrations. The profound impression which any great cosmic truth makes even upon the least instructed portion of the public is well exemplified in the discovery, or rather rediscovery, of the heliocentric system by Copernicus and Galileo. Although at first antagonized by the church as contrary to Holy Writ, it was soon universally accepted and came to constitute a part of the stock of knowledge of millions who could not follow out the simplest mathematical demonstration, clearly showing that it is not necessary to be an astronomer or a mathematician to understand laws that have taxed the brains of the ablest astronomers and mathematicians to demonstrate.

Passing to physics, not to speak of the discovery of the law of gravitation which is so closely connected with the heliocentric system, but which everybody now understands in a certain way, we may note the social effect of the establishment of the law of the conservation of energy. How profoundly it influences the life and even the conduct of all but the very lowest classes of society. Everybody realizes that the invisible powers around him have been rescued from a state of chaos and reduced to a condition of law. Add to this the inspiration it has lent to invention and the condition it has furnished for the recent strides in engineering and mechanic art.

The march of geological truth has not been less prolific of social results. The knowledge of the world that has resulted from the researches of Werner, Blumenbach, Hutton and Lyell has exerted a moral influence that penetrates into the lowest strata of society. It has also led to the development of the resources of the earth as nothing else could have done.

The last great epoch-making truth has come through biology. The law of animal and vegetal development, of the derivation of the higher types from the lower, of organic advance through the ages, has probably influenced the thought and action of the world in a higher degree than any other one cause. The progress of this idea is also the best illustration of the way great truths work, of the manner in which thought waves propagate themselves through the social media and light up the darkest corners of the world.

Finally of all these truths there has now been a synthesis; a wider law has been discovered that embraces them all, and the whole universe, from the nebulae and remotest stars to mankind and human society, is seen to be evolving and rolling on toward some unknown goal. The law of evolution has been disclosed. Where is the eddy so hidden and sequestered in social life that it has not felt some seismic jar from this vast psychic earthquake?

But progress in unfolding the truths of the universe has taken place in the order of their remoteness from human interests. The ones earliest brought to light were farthest from man and least useful to him. Astronomical truth was less valuable than physical, and physical than vital.

There are two great domains in which scarcely any wide discoveries have yet been made. These are the domains of mind and society. Psychic and social truth, when it shall begin to be revealed, will be far more practical than even biologic truth. The leading propositions in both these fields are today chiefly in the stage of theory. To exert an influence they must be *established*. Sociologists must agree upon those that are capable of demonstration and recognize them according to their value. In the present state of the science each one is so intent on his own discoveries, or supposed discoveries, that he can scarcely take time to acquaint himself with the views of others. But society has a right to demand that everything that is true shall be made public property. The teacher in particular is bound to weigh all results impartially and to give the student an opportunity to do the same. In this way what is not true will be eliminated

and what is true will be classified and each truth assigned its place in a general system.

If the great law of the conservation of energy and the correlation of forces, which has brought order out of chaos in the physical world, can be extended to the psychic and social world, at whatever sacrifice of false pride, the gain must be stupendous. If there can really be established a "dynamics of mind"¹ and a "mechanics of society," the era of speculation in these fields is over and the era of science has begun. An age of psychic and social invention and discovery must follow, ushering in an age of social machinery. The general acceptance of such a truth, if it be a truth (and if it be not there is no social science), might ultimately have the effect to transform and unify the entire system of human government by substituting, as has been done in the physical world, the laws and powers of nature for those of man.

While I cannot but regard this as by far the most important of all sociological principles, I freely admit that there are many others of high utilitarian rank that simply require verification, elucidation and elaboration. Once established they should be fully recognized, no matter how humble or obscure the source from which they may have emanated, and speedily added to the common stock of knowledge.

But aside entirely from all extravagant claims for any system, independently of the question whether any of the alleged social principles are sound, it is still safe to assert that there must be elements for a science of society, and that when these elements are detected, collated and reduced to law such a science will be established; and it is further beyond question that when the true science of society shall be established and accepted as other sciences are accepted, its influence on the interests of man and the destiny of the race will be as much greater than that of the simpler sciences as sociology is nearer to man and more intimately bound up with all that concerns his welfare.

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¹ *Psychic Factors of Civilization*, chap. XV.